Vol. II No. 10 **critical digest** December 26, 1949

The Weekly That Keeps You Informed Of The Current Broadway Critical Scene

N.Y.Openings This Week

The Velvet Glove-Booth, 12/26/49. Rosemary Casey's play of life in a convent, which won the 1949 Christopher's award, opened to mixed notices in Boston. Though most of the daily and trade press critics felt the play was well written and expertly acted, they felt the pace was too slow and the interest among non-Catholics too slack to insure a successful N.Y.run. Guthrie McClintic production co-stars Walter Hampden and Grace George.

How Long Till Summer-Playhouse, 12/27/49. New Haven and Philadelphia critics were generally disappointed with the Sarett and Herbert Rudley play. All Negro cast features folk singer Josh White playing a dramatic role, together with Josh White, Jr. Pre-opening Broadway newspaper display ads presented letter from Mrs. FDR wishing success to the enterprise.

She Stoops To Conquer-City Center, 12/28/49. Opening play of N.Y.City Theater company is the Goldsmith comedy. Play which will run through January 8th includes Celeste Holme, Brian Aherne, Ezra Stone, Burl Ives and Evelyn Varden in its all star cast. Seats are on sale for the entire four play season.

Quick Glance at New N.Y.Shows -- digests on inside pages

The Rat Race-Barrymore, 12/22/49. One pro review, several so-so reviews and the rest con reviews is the score of the daily critics on Garson Kanin's new play. Acting of leads Barry Nelson and Betty Field, unit set by Donald Oenslager, and supporting cast came in for praise. But the critics thought the script echoed the writing of other playwrights.

Caesar and Cleopatra-National, 12/21/49. With the exception of the critics of the Compass and the Journal American, the daily critics lauded the revival of the GBS comedy. Though Sir Cedric Hardwicke's laryngitis delayed the opening one night, the critics praised both his direction and acting. Several critics didn't think it fair to comment on his performance until his throat was better, but all cited Lilli Palmer's portrayal of the Queen of the Nile as superb. Supporting cast also was highly commended.

Shows That Closed

Montserrat-Fulton, 10/29/49. Lillian Hellman adaptation of French play starring Emlyn Williams drew slightly more con reviews than pro reviews. Critics who had read the original script didn't think Hellman brought all the values of the original to her direction. Play was sold to the movies this week for $40,000.

Magazine Reviewers Look at the New Shows -- digests on inside pages

Clutterbuck-Biltmore, 12/3/49. Margaret Marshall, subbing for the ill Joseph Wood Krutch as the Nation's critic, credits the quote from New Yorker's Wolcott Gibbs naming Arthur Margetson as the best satirist on the stage as extending the run of the Benn Levy comedy. She thought show was in line of Private Lives, but not as good.

The Father-Cort, 11/16/49. Theatre Arts' critic panned the Strindberg revival, but he placed all of the blame directly on the co-star and director Raymond Massey.

N.Y.C. Criticism At A Glance -- see page 829 -- Cumulative Index Issued Monthly

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Post Critic Longs for Show to Praise

Richard Watts, Jr. finds it quite an experience to discover himself liking fewer plays this season than George Jean Nathan. The Post critic wrote "It will be a great pleasure to me, and I suspect to one or two other people, when something comes along this season that I can heartily, completely and resoundingly praise."

The Rat Race

a. Times --So-So-- Number of beguiling scenes, quick glances into hearts of characters and tokens of generous understanding. Kanin looks on from too great a distance to make either a firm play or a deeply felt work of art. Field gives superb performance that ranks with best work in our theatre. Nelson gives shining performance. Direction easy and imaginative.-Atkinson.

b. Herald Tribune --Con-- Kanin written at great length and to very little effect about seamier side of N.Y.life. Efforts not nearly enough to make production satisfying. In book or musical it might have certain appeal. On stage is repetitious, tasteless and contrived. Field portrayal is flavorsome and persuasive. Secondary parts better written, acted than leads.-Barnes.

c. News --Con-- Rueful, sometimes bitter chronicle, but Kanin has not managed enough suspense and continuity to make it as absorbing as I hoped. Could and should have been as excellent as Baker's novel Young Man with a Horn. Oenslager set is perhaps best feature. Attractively played, some interesting type actors, and some of Kanin's scenes in his best comedy vein.-Chapman.

d. Mirror --Pro-- Tragi-comedy looms as winner. Still like Born Yesterday better, this show is worth your attention, exciting theatre. Field is on the wonderful side, Nelson is perfect type. Character actors are tops.-Coleman.

e. Compass --Con-- Happenings enough for any play. Better plays have been made with less, but author does very little about them. Not much of talk has flavor. Smooth production, actors all they should be. But they have no exciting or appealing things to do.-Pollock.

f. Post --Con-- Cast's best efforts cannot make up for the fact that play is flat and unexhilarating. Theatre can be a most discouraging place. In spite of virtues of humor, atmosphere, minor characterizations and work of the two leads, it is hollow, fabricated and superficial play.-Watts.

g. Sun --Con-- Kanin tossed together great deal of everything -- gags, atmosphere, vaudeville, sentiment, melodrama -- but never did get around to writing himself a play. Scanty and dawdling play has fine performances by leads. Hayward, the man of the big hits, misses this time. It's time to become worried when you realize that in late December an author of Kanin stature turns in such a hollow and strident hodge-podge.-Morehouse.

h. Journal American --Con-- Nelson the most legitimate reason for going to see play. Otherwise it is disappointment. Pre Pulitzer Owen Davis material with one touch of Elmer Rice and another of William Saroyan. Without these touches play could be "Helen, the Uncultivated Call Girl" or "More Sinned Against than Reasonable". Large and worthy cast seem outside the melodramatic plot. Field is Fledian but Familiar, Set is Miezineran but distracting.-Garland.

i. World Telegram --Con-- Sweaty opus with all the attraction of its title. Hardly element in play fails to echo. Catch self thinking of The Goldbergs, Kathleen Norris serials, True Story, Our Town, Two on an Island and Bicycle Thief. Field performance fascinating, Nelson fresh and alive.-Hawkins.

Checking the Ads

"Had the first nighters howling." is the phrase credited to Coleman, Mirror, in the display ad for Clutterbuck. Coleman, who didn't like the Benn Levy comedy wrote "For it offers several hilarious episodes that had a majority of the first nighters howling at intervals. But it is, we suspect, too frail and spotty for a solid click. It doesn't quite come off."

Caesar and Cleopatra

a. Times --Pro-- Since Hardwicke is seriously handicapped with laryngitis, not fair to judge his performance. Though production is gorgeous and performance sound, it lacks lightness and sparkle. Can be improved when Hardwicke recovers. Palmer's Cleopatra is nothing short of ideal. Production is lovely and luminous, castings perceptive. Too much in wise, witty play to be wasted.-Atkinson.

b. Herald Tribune --Pro-- Enchanting revival captivatingly served. Palmer plays with subtle blend of vivacity and viciousness, Hardwicke is splended. Cast collaborates on rich and eloquent performance.-Barnes.

c. News --Pro-- Play and performance make theatre going pleasure for anyone who really likes to go to shows. Most interesting company of actors seen in long time. Of course there is conversation in GBS play, do you expect acrobatics? Palmer the loveliest, most sexy Queen of the Nile since the original model. Also happens that she can act. Hardwicke splendid.-Chapman.

d. Mirror --Pro-- First rate revival of stimulating comedy. Would like to see it again within fortnight, because Hardwicke was handicapped and tardy audience prevented us from hearing much of the first act. Palmer is obvious mixture of feline, viper and vamp. Recommend play, offers intelligent, literate and rewarding evening. Best comedy on Broadway.-Coleman.

e. Compass --Con-- Not until third act does Shaw and actors begin to take hold of the audience. Before this things are disorganized and sloppy, Hardwicke shows no ability as actor or director until this time. Must marvel at Shaw's insight. Very little of Queen in Palmer until third act also.-Pollock.

f. Post --Pro-- Playful, witty, provocative variation on historical theme emerges in all its brightness and splendor in handsome and skillfully wrought production. Stands head and shoulders above routine exhibitions that the season has been content to offer. Hardwicke role fits him to perfection, Palmer as humorous and lovely as her admirers claimed for her last season in My Name Is Aquilion. Fine performances in excellent parts by all. Theatre becomes worth bothering about again.-Watts.

g. Sun --Pro-- Wise, eloquent, witty comedy, despite fact that Hardwicke should have been home in bed. With him in good voice, new production will take its place as a highly satisfying revival. Palmer is delightful and effective enough. Poetic and vastly entertaining presentation.-Morehouse.

h. World Telegram --So-So-- Gorgeous production never achieves the crackling quality one expects. Due to Hardwicke effort to act and direct and his laryngitis. Only Treacher of the supporting cast seemed inspired. Two leads are true artists. Set all in flavor of the script.-Hawkins.

i. Journal American --Con-- Shaw's kindly dictator and unkindly Queen call for more than Shavian togas and super six. Maybe it was the overheated playgoers or the underheated players, Hardwicke's illness -- but the production was let down by the actors. Play is worthier, funnier and better than played. Actors look the part in costumes, but don't play the part.-Garland.

Drama Editor "Stars" in Diamond Lil

N.Y.Post drama editor Vernon Rice played the role of a "bum" for a single performance of Mae West's Diamond Lil. Made up by Mae herself, Rice described the divine moment when his head rested on her diamond covered chest. "After that I could not help but give my best. I was wonderful in that tense scene in which I chased Jerry Tobias across the stage. You could hear the whole house coughing. After the show, waiting in the wings for the word of praise from my co-star, Mae looked at me for a moment and said 'Where was you?'"

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes

a. New Yorker --Pro-- Special quality of original novel seems to have completely vanished. Taken purely as a musical comedy seemed lot like, but not quite as good as Billion Dollar Baby. Some of the material is very entertaining, some too familiar approve of proceedings two thirds of time, Ninety percent improvement over Miss Liberty and Texas Li'l Darlin'. Channing happy choice.-Gibbs.

b. Journal of Commerce --Pro-- Walloping hit that all but dislocates your funny bone. Channing is Queen of Musical Comedy, a show unto herself. Show should make arrangements to occupy theatre permanently. It's the rowdiest, funniest and most exquisite holiday treat we can recommend.-Colby.

c. Wall Street Journal --Pro-- Channing is Lorelie to the life and beyond it. Emphasis on beauty, not ballet. Production a treat. Another example of hard work and talent blended. Creates in audience a mood of happy attention.-Cooke.

d. Nation --Con-- Creative spark only intermittently kindled in elaborate, professional and noisy show. Can't tell if Channing star comedienne from one part. Dances uninspired, silly scene in Bois could be eliminated.-Marshall.

Metropole

e. George Jean Nathan --Pro-- Critically creaky affair had its funny moments. Poorly contrived play, but rebelliously comic and occasionally hilarious. If you hadn't paid attention to criticism you might have profited from the dismissal of it. Was admirably cast and acted.

f. Morning Telegraph --Con-- Tracy good, but unlucky, actor. Result is disordered, dislocated and not very funny. Kaufman direction only occasionally shows the hand of master. Tracy has aid of good cast. Tracy not enough.-Bolton.

g. Wall Street Journal --So-So -- Despite shortcomings, it is hard not to have good will toward play. It is intelligent, if author worked harder on weak spots might be better. Tracy is dynamo with high voltage.-Cooke.

Clutterbuck

h. Nation --Con-- Show is in line of Private Lives, but Levy is no Coward. Margetson is good, but not "most accomplished satirist on the stage" as Gibbs bills him. Lightness of play often turns to lead.-Marshall.

The Father

i. New Republic --Con-- Didn't have good time, production lacked point of view, acting conventional and weak. Play must be done as a savage melodrama or as rather complex psychological drama. But that would not bring in cash.-Clurman.

j. Theatre Arts --Con-- Played as character study, not as savage drama. Pace is ponderous, acting is trite and muddled. Shouldn't blame play, but director.-NN.

Caesar and Cleopatra

a. Brooklyn Eagle -- Pro-- Leads are major delight of this or any season. No dust on 1898 play, and none on entire production. Played with bounce, vitality and keen relish. Staged in lively, straight forward style.-Sheaffer.

b. Newark News --Pro-- Title roles acted with distinctive charm, play becomes at once a most rewarding experience. Hardwicke directed with admirable skill and intelligence. Competent supporting cast.-Field.

c. Morning Telegraph --Pro-- Evening of long but witty talk in play as fresh as last night's Duco on the medicine cabinet. Brilliantly acted by expert company. Masterly direction. Didn't like Nicholas Joy and he can sue me.-Bolton.

d. Women's Wear Daily --Pro-- Enormously enjoyable play, wise, witty and pointed Beautifully mounted, scintillatingly produced. Hardwicke direction gives play lambent, buoyant and jocular touch.-Dash.

The Rat Race

e. Brooklyn Eagle --So-So-- Constantly promises to develop into something really special, but never quite makes the grade. Many excellent features, brilliant fluent staging, number of fine scenes, vividly portrayed characters, colorful background. Only moderately entertaining show. Main trouble is indecision of leading character, play drifts with her. Parts greater than the whole.-Sheaffer.

f. Newark News --Con-- Disconcerting to see such fine writer as Kanin deep into pseudo-Saroyanesque wordage with dashes of Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller tossed in. Energetically acted but disappointing venture. Fail to sympathize with plight of lead, in spite of fine acting.-Field.

The Closing Door

g. Commonweal --Pro-- Most intelligent and exciting melodrama seen on Broadway. Seriously produced and directed. Cast valiantly upholds intensity. Honest as well as exciting theatre.-Phelan.

I Know My Love

h. Theatre Arts --Con-- Behrman let the Lunts down abysmally. Script full of dull, aimless charades that sound like parody on a Behrman play. One scene so dimly lighted one almost got headache trying to see what was going on.

Key To N.Y.C. Criticism At A Glance

Reviewers are rated as to how they like the show, not if they think it will be a hit. "Pro" means the reviewer recommends the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening. "Con" means he doesn't recommend it as such. "So-So" means the reviewer didn't state his preference directly.

1. NY Times
2. NY Herald Tribune
3. NY News
4. NY Mirror
5. NY Compass (Star, PM)
6. NY Post
7. NY Sun
8. NY Journal American
9. NY World Telegram
10. Brooklyn Eagle
11. Newark News
12. Women's Wear Daily
13. Daily Worker
14. Wall Street Journal
15. Journal of Commerce
16. George Jean Nathan
17. Morning Telegraph
18. Variety
19. Billboard
20. Theatre Arts
21. Catholic World
22. Commonweal
23. Cue
24. Ch. Sci. Monitor
25. Sat. Review Lit.
26. Newsweek
27. Time
28. Nation
29. New Republic
30. New Yorker

N.Y.C. Criticism At A Glance -- see page 835 for key

As The Girls Go-Broadway, 11/14/48. Pro: 1-4-6-7-8-10-11-12-14-15-16-18-19-23-26-27-29-30. Con: 2-5-17-22. So-So: 3-9-20-21.

Born Yesterday-Miller, 2/4/45. All 30 critics voted "Pro".

Clutterbuck-Biltmore, 12/3/49. Pro: 5-6-7-8-12-17-19-23-27-30. Con: 1-9-11-18-26. So-So: 2-4.

Death Of A Salesman-Morosco, 2/10/49. Pro: 28 votes. Con: Nation. So-So: Time

Detective Story-Hudson, 3/23/49. Pro: 1-2-3-4-6-7-8-9-12-14-15-17-18-19-20-22-23-26-27-30.

Diamond Lil-Plymouth, 2/5/49. 30 reviews for Mae. 30 reviews against her play.

I Know My Love-Shubert, 11/1/49. Pro: 2-3-4-6-7-8-10-11-12-14-15-17-18-19-23-26. Con: 1-5-22-27-30.

Kiss Me, Kate-Century, 12/31/48. Pro: 28 votes. Con: New Republic. So-So: No review in Nation.

Lend An Ear-Mansfield, 12/16/48. Pro: 1-2-3-4-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-15-16-17-18-19-20-21-22-23-24-26-27-30. Con: 5-13-29. So-So: 14-28.

Lost In The Stars-Music Box, 10/30/49. Pro: 1-2-3-5-6-7-10-11-12-14-15-17-18-19-20-21-22-23-24-26-27-30. Con: 5-13-29. So-So: 4-27.

Miss Liberty-Imperial, 7/15/49. Pro: 4-7-8-12-18-19. Con: 1-2-18-20-23-27-29. So-So: 3-6-9-21-26.

Mister Roberts-Alvin, 2/13/49. Pro: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-14-15-18-19-20-22-23-25-26-27-29-30. Con: 24. So-So: 2-15-17.

Montserrat-Fulton, 10/29/49. Pro: 3-5-6-8-9-11-12-13-22-27. Con: 1-4-7-10-14-16-18-19-23-24-25-26-28-30. So-So: 2-15-17.

South Pacific-Majestic, 4/8/49. Pro: 1-2-3-4-6-7-8-9-12-15-17-18-19-20-24-25-26-30. So-So: 24-27.

Texas Li'l Darlin'-Hellinger, 11/25/49. Pro: 3-6-9-12-14-15-16-17. Con: 1-4-4-8-18-19-23-30. So-So: 2-5-10-11-26-27.

That Lady-Beck, 11/22/49. Pro: 1-9-10-11-19. Con: 2-3-5-6-8-12-14-16-17-18-23 26-27-28-30. So-So: 4-7.

The Father-Cort, 11/16/49. Pro: 3-10-11-17-23-26. Con: 2-4-5-7-8-9-12-13-14-16-19-22-24-27-30. So-So: 1-6-18-28.

The Madwoman of Chaillot-Royale, 12/28/48. Pro: 1-2-3-5-11-12-13-14-18-20-21-22-23-24-25-26-27-29-30. Con: 4-6-7-8-15-16-19-28. So-So: 9-10.

Touch and Go-Broadhurst, 10/13/49. Pro: 1-3-6-9-11-12-13-15-16-17-23-24-26-27-28-30. Con: 2-4-5-7-14-18-19-20-22. So-So: 8-10-29.

Where's Charley?-St.James, 10/11/49. Pro: 1-2-3-5-8-11-14-15-17-18-20-21-23-29 30. Con: 6-7-12-13-16-19-22-24-25-26. So-So: 4-27.

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Cumulative Index for 1949-1950 Season January 1950
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Key To Monthly Cumulative Index

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13. Daily Worker
14. Wall St. Journal
15. Journal of Commerce
16. George Jean Nathan
17. Morning Telegraph
18. Variety
19. Billboard
20. Theatre Arts
21. Catholic World
22. Commonweal
23. Cue
24. Ch. Sci. Monitor
25. Sat. Review Lit.
26. Newsweek
27. Time
28. Nation
29. New Republic
30. New Yorker

Current Shows

Caesar and Cleopatra-National, 12/21/49. Pro: 1-827A,2-827B,3-827C,4-827D, 6-827F,7-827G,1-829A,11-829B,12-829D,17-829C. Con: 5-827E,8-827I. So-So: 9-827H.

Clutterbuck-Biltmore, 12/3/49. Pro: 3-840B,5-840D,6-840E,7-840F,8-840G,12-839 D,15-834A,17-839C,19-839B23-839F,27-839H,28-839I. Con: 1-839J,9-840H,11-839E, 13-834C,16-834E,18-839A,24-834D,26-839G,28-828H. So-So: 2-840A,4-840C,10-840I,14-834B.

I Know My Love-Shubert, 11/1/49. Pro: 2-864B,3-864C,4-864D,6-864F,7-864G, 8-864H,9-864I,10-864J,11-864K,12-864L,14-865G,15-865H,17-865A,18-865B,19-865C, 23-865E,24-859C,25-846H,26-865D,28-859A. Con: 1-864A,5-864E,16-855A,20-829H, 22-860E,27-865E,29-859B,30-859D.

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes-Ziegfeld, 12/8/49. Pro: 1-832A,2-832B,3-832C,4-832D, 5-832E,7-832G,8-832H,9-832I,10-835D,11-835E,12-835F,14-828C,15-828B,17-835C,18-835A, 26-835H,30-828A. Con: 6-832F,28-828D. So-So: 19-835B,23-835G,27-833I.

Lost In The Stars-Music Box, 10/30/49. Pro: 1-875B,2-875C,3-875D,5-874K,6 6-875F,7-875G,10-875J,11-874C,12-874D,14-874I,15-874J,17-874B,18-873L,19-874A, 23-874G,26-874E. Con: 8-875H,9-875I,13-868G,22-854F,24-868F,25-854G,28-861A, 29-861A,30-868I. So-So: 4-875E,27-874F.

Texas Lil' Darlin'-Hellinger, 11/25/49. Pro: 3-844C,6-844F,9-844I,12-846A,13-833F, 14-846B,16-846C,16-841C,17-846D,22-833D,24-833G. Con: 1-844A,4-844D,7-844G,8-844H, 18-846E,19-846F,23-847C,29-833E,30-847F. So-So: 2-844B,5-844E,10-844J,11-846G, 26-847D,27-847E.

That Lady-Beck, 11/22/49. Pro: 1-852A,9-852I,10-853A,11-853B,19-845D. Con: 2-852B,3-852C,5-852E,6-852F,8-852H,12-853C,14-845A,15-845B,16-845E,17-853D,180845C, 22-833B,23-845F,24-833A,26-845H,27-845G,28-848E,29-833C,30-845I. So-So: 4-852D, 7-852G.

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Current Shows

The Father-Cort, 11/16/49. Pros 3-858C,10-858J,11-858K,17-853H,23-845A,26-854B. Con: 2-858B,4-858D,5-858E,7-858G,8-858I,9-858H,12-853G,13-847A,14-853I,15-853J, 16-841D,19-853F,20-858J,22-847A,24-847B,27-854C,29-828I,30-854E. So-So: 1-858A, 6-858F,18-853E,28-854D.

The Rat Race -Barrymore,12-22/49. Pros 4-826D. Con: 2-826B,3-826C,5-826E, 6-826F,7-826G,8-826H,9-826I,10-829E,11-829F. So-So: 1-826A.

Touch and Go-Broadhurst, 10/13/49. Pros 1-891A,3-891C,6-891F,9-891I,11-891K, 12-891L,13-880C,16-887D,16-880E,17-887E,23-887K,24-880D,26-887H,27-887I,30-887J. Con: 2-891B,4-891D,5-891E,7-891G,14-887C,18-887F,22-865K. So-So: 8-891L,10-891L, 29-875A.

Continuing Shows from Past Seasons

-See NYC Criticism At A Glance for Ratings-

As the Girls Go-Broadway, 11/14/49
Death of A Salesman-Morosco, 2/10/49
Detective Story-Hudson, 3/23/49
Diamond Lil-Plymouth, 2/5/49
Kiss Me, Kate-Century, 12/31/48
Lend An Ear-Mansfield, 12/16/48
Miss Liberty-Imperial, 7/15/49
Mister Roberts-Alvin, 2/13/48
South Pacific-Majestic, 4/8/49
The Madwoman of Chaillot-Royale, 12/28/48
Where's Charley?-St.James, 10/11/48

New Shows That Closed

Blackouts - 9/6/49 - 10/15/49
Browning Version - 10/12/49 - 12/10/49
Love Me Long - 11/7/49 - 11/12/49
Metropole - 12/8/49 - 12/9/49
Montserrat - 10/29/49 - 12/24/49
Regina - 10/31/49 - 12/17/49
The Closing Door - 12/1/49 - 12/17/49
Yes, M'Lord - 10/4/49 - 12/17/49
Twelfth Night - 10/3/49 - 11/12/49

Shows of Past Seasons That Closed

A Streetcar Named Desire - 12/3/47 - 12/17/49
Anne of the 1000 Days - 12/8/48 - 10/10/49
Born Yesterday - 2/4/46 - 12/31/49
Goodbye My Fancy - 11/17/48 - 12/10/49